particles, that is, the titanium nitride particles are independently dispersed. The difference of the long and short axes of the titanium nitride particles is 0.2 μm or less.

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims to read as follows:

1. (Amended) A wear resistant member, comprising:

a silicon nitride sintered body;

wherein the silicon nitride sintered body comprises from 75 to 97% by mass of silicon nitride, from 0.2 to 5% by mass of particles of titanium nitride having a long axis of 1 μm or less and from 2 to 20% by mass of a grain boundary phase comprising a Si-R-Al-O-N compound, where R is a rare earth element.

2. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein the particles of titanium nitride are dispersed in the silicon nitride sintered body as single particles.

4. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein the particles of titanium nitride are dispersed in the grain boundary phase.

5. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein at least 80% by volume of the particles of titanium nitride have an aspect ratio in the range of from 1.0 to 1.2.

6. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein the particles of titanium nitride have a long axis and short axis which are different by 0.2 μm or less.

8. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein the silicon nitride sintered body has a porosity of 0.5% or less and a maximum pore diameter of 2 μm or less.

9. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein the silicon nitride sintered body has a three point flexural strength of 1000 MPa or more and a facture toughness of 6.5 $MPa \cdot m^{1/2}$ or more.

10. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein, the wear resistant member has a rolling fatigue life of 1×10^8 times or more when tested with a thrust bearing testing machine, under the conditions of opponent material of a SUJ2 steel ball provided by JIS G4805, a load of 39.2 MPa, and a number of rotation of 1200 rpm, and the rolling fatigue life is measured until a surface of the wear resistant member is peeled off.

11. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein the wear resistant member comprises a ball member.

12. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 11:

wherein the ball member has a crushing strength of 200MPa or more and a facture toughness of 6.5 $MPa \cdot m^{1/2}$ or more.

13. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 11:

wherein, the ball member has a rolling fatigue life of 400 hr or more when tested with a thrust bearing testing machine, under the conditions of opponent material of a SUJ2 steel plane table provided by JIS G4805, a maximum contact stress of 5.9 GPa, a ball, and a number of rotation of 1200 rpm, and the rolling fatigue life is measured until a surface of the ball member is peeled off.

14. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein the grain boundary phase comprises from 0.5 to 10% by mass of a rare earth element in terms of oxide, from 0.1 to 5% by mass of aluminum oxide and 5% by mass or less of aluminum nitride.

15. (Amended) The wear resistant member as set forth in claim 1:

wherein the silicon nitride sintered body further comprises at least one element selected from the group consisting of magnesium, zirconium, hafnium and tungsten in the range of from 0.1 to 5% by mass in terms of oxide.

17. (Amended) A method of manufacturing the wear resistant member of claim 1, comprising the steps of:

mixing silicon nitride powder comprising 1.7% by mass or less of oxygen and 90% by mass or more of α-silicon nitride having an average particle diameter of 1.0 μm or less, from 0.5 to 10% by mass of a rare earth compound in terms of oxide, from 0.1 to 5% by mass of titanium nitride having an average particle diameter of 0.7 μm or less or a titanium compound that forms titanium nitride by sintering in terms of titanium nitride, from 0.1 to 5% by mass of aluminum oxide and 5% by mass or less of aluminum nitride, thereby providing mixture of raw materials;

molding the mixture of raw materials into a desired shape;

heat treating, after degreasing the molded body obtained after said molding, at a temperature in the range of from 1300 to 1450°C; and

sintering the heat-treated molded body at a temperature in the range of from 1600 to 1900°C.

18. (Amended) The method of manufacturing a wear resistant member as set forth in claim 17:

wherein the mixture of raw materials is added in a plurality of portions to the silicon nitride powder, the titanium nitride or the titanium compound that forms titanium nitride due to the sintering.

19. (Amended) The method of manufacturing a wear resistant member as set forth in claim 17: